

## Pure Gospel

Galatians 1:1-5

Intro: Paul's letter to the Galatians has been called "The Magna Carta of Christianity". It is a fiery document that boldly declares the believer's freedom from sin in Christ Jesus!

It was a book mightily used by God during the Reformation to rediscover the core truths of the gospel. Martin Luther called this his favorite book in the Bible and wrote a magnificent commentary on it. John Bunyan, the author of "Pilgrim's Progress", called Luther's commentary on Galatians his favorite book in all the world besides the Bible.

This is a necessary book particularly in our day and in our country. Just last month Arizona Christian University released the results of a survey of American Worldviews. The report begins like this:

"Unlike past generations of Americans, who readily recognized the reality of sin and the need for salvation through Jesus Christ, U.S. adults today adopt a "salvation-can-be-earned" perspective, with a near-majority (48%) believing that if a person is generally good, or does enough good things during their life, they will "earn" a place in Heaven." <sup>1</sup>

Even worse, the survey found,

"A majority of Americans who describe themselves as **Christian** (52 percent) accept a "works-oriented" means to God's acceptance."

Less we think we are immune; I have found that it is not uncommon for people who have been born and raised in Reformed Churches to struggle to concisely define the gospel. And why is it that Reformed believers so often seem to lack joy? In Galatians, Paul links a lack of Christian joy to a failure to believe the true gospel. There are other signs:

- If you refuse to forgive those who've sinned against you – you don't sufficiently believe the gospel.
- If you pride yourself on your morality, or your observance of religious duties, or your theological orthodoxy, thinking that these things somehow give you a standing with God, you don't really understand the gospel.
- If you are at peace in your sin and have no hunger for holiness, no sincere love for Christ – then, no matter what you may profess with your mouth, your life is giving you away. You don't really understand the gospel.

We need to hear the message of this book.

There is a weightiness and seriousness to this book. Paul throws punches in this letter. His pen is boiling as he writes these words. He is angry and astonished and deeply concerned. Why? Because some false teachers have slipped into the church and were teaching a different gospel than the one Paul had delivered to them.

In our post-modern, create-your-own-truth world, that might not seem like a very big deal. Why doesn't Paul just agree to disagree on this?? Well, it's because Paul understands that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the one and only means of salvation for sinners. There is no other way for sinners to be reconciled to God than through the true gospel. So when the gospel is distorted, when God's people are taught to accept a different gospel - people die. They perish. They go to hell. Eternally. That's why Paul is so angry and upset. That's why Paul says, "Even if an angel from heaven comes and proclaims a gospel contrary to the one we proclaimed to you, let him be accursed!" Let him be damned. This matters. It matters so, so much. A correct understanding and receiving of the gospel will be the difference between an eternity of bliss in heaven or an eternity of horror in hell. It is essential that we understand and receive the pure gospel.

## I. The Issue of Authority

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—

Paul begins by affirming his authority as an apostle. He will pick this theme up in further detail beginning in 1:11 and we will deal with it more fully then.

Paul is writing to churches he had planted on his first missionary journey. You can read about it in Acts 13-14. He traveled through the towns of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe proclaiming the good news of salvation as a free gift from God through Jesus to those who believe. Paul argued from the Old Testament Scriptures that being religious and doing good works could never make a person righteous before God. The only way to be saved is to receive God's gift of forgiveness and righteousness offered freely to sinners in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have an example of Paul's message in Acts 13.

**Acts 13:38–39** Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, <sup>39</sup>and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Paul was announcing a message of forgiveness and freedom in Christ. He clearly pointed out that Jesus had accomplished for sinners what the law could never do. The law of God can show you your sin, it can convict you of sin – but it cannot set you free from sin. It cannot remove the penalty or pollution or power of your sin. But Jesus can! The pure gospel is fundamentally a free gospel. It is a message of freely given grace and freely given forgiveness and freely given righteousness through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That was the message Paul had preached and these Christians had believed. But now, some Jewish Christians had come to these churches challenging the veracity of Paul's gospel and his authority as an Apostle. They were seeking to undermine his Apostolic authority in order to give credence to their criticism of his gospel.

The Devil plays this game all the time. One of his favorite tricks to lead people away from Christ is to get them to question the authority and truthfulness of the Bible. If the Devil is able to undermine your confidence in the Bible, he can make you believe anything.

Paul sternly reminds his readers that his Apostleship is genuine. He was not an apostle by the appointment of men. He was commissioned directly by Jesus Christ and God the Father. His apostolic authority comes straight from the throne of the Resurrected Christ. The point is - if you have a problem with Paul, then you have a problem with Jesus.

It is popular for liberal teachers still today to try to draw a line between the Christianity of Jesus and the Christianity of Paul. The Christianity of Jesus, they will say, was about love and doing good works. The Christianity of Paul, on the other hand, is stern and all about doctrines and driving away heretics. There are Christians today who will say "We follow Jesus. Paul – not so much."

But Paul won't let you get away with that false division. And neither will Jesus. In Luke 10 he said this to his appointed messengers.

**Luke 10:16** "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

You can't separate the Christianity of Jesus and the Christianity of Paul. As an Apostle appointed by Jesus Christ – his words carry all the authority of Christ. They are, in fact, Christ's words. Consequently, Paul's gospel and Jesus' gospel are one and the same.

So what is the pure gospel?

## II. The Pure Gospel

<sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup>who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup>to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**A. It is a Declaration of Grace and Peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel is first of all a declaration, from God, of grace and peace to sinners. It is an announcement from God that sinners can be forgiven by grace alone – and can live daily in that free grace of God through Jesus Christ. That’s what the peace of the gospel is – the daily confidence that God, in Christ, has freely forgiven you claimed you as his own. The gospel announces that “God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

How is this possible? I mean, God is a holy God. He does not ignore or overlook any sin. Ever! Every single sin that has ever been performed in the history of the world will be punished, it must be punished or God is not just. So how can I, a sinful man who has broken God’s holy law a thousand, thousand times over – how can I possibly receive Gods’ grace and peace??

### ***B. A Declaration of Christ’s Atoning Death for Sinners***

“who gave himself for our sins”

The gospel is not about you or me. It isn’t a teaching about how we should live or what we should do. It is a message from God about what Jesus has done for us in his death and resurrection. He gave himself for our sins. This is the essence of the good news.

Notice the possessive personal pronoun Paul attaches to the word “sin”. Jesus gave himself for “our” sin. The Bible insists that the great need of mankind is the need for deliverance from sin. The world will tell you that the greatest crisis is war, or poverty, or racism, or any other effect of the fall. All of those problems are real – but they are only the symptoms, the fruits of the problem. The foundational crisis is that we are all born with a twisted sinful nature that loves evil and hates God. And out of that sick, twisted nature we lie and lust and cheat and steal and covet and boast.

For those sins, Jesus gave himself. In other words, Jesus, the very Son of God, “God of God, light of light, very God of very God” gave himself for our sins. The man Jesus, born of a virgin, perfectly obedient to His Father in heaven in every aspect – full of grace and truth and love for sinners – this perfect, sinless, God-Man gave himself for our sins. This is the essence of the gospel. Jesus gave himself for our sins.

Those words “gave himself” moved Paul deeply. The willing sacrifice of Jesus on a cross for his sin defined his life. In chapter **2:20** he writes,

“The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”

The thought that the very Son of God would willingly set aside His glory, be born as a man, and then willingly take our perversions upon His own sinless shoulders and bear our transgressions to cross, suffering the wrath of God we deserved – giving His life to pay for our guilt, for no other reason than that He loved us - that thought humbled Paul like no other. The willing, life-giving, sin-bearing love of Christ compelled Paul to live his life for Jesus.

**2 Corinthians 5:14** For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup>and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

The gospel is a message of a Loving Savior who came from heaven precisely in order to give his life as a ransom for our sin. This was Jesus own understanding of the reason for his life on earth.

**Mark 10:45** “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

This is the gospel. It is a declaration to sinners of grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sin.

### **C. A Declaration of Rescue**

*“To deliver us from this present evil age.”*

John Stott points out that the word translated “deliver” can also be translated as “to rescue”. It is used in the Book of Acts of the rescue of the Israelites from their Egyptian slavery (7:34), of the rescue of Peter from prison and the hand of Herod the King (12:11), end of the rescue of Paul from an infuriated mob about to lynch him (23:27).”

John Stott, “Christianity is a rescue religion.”<sup>2</sup>

From what does Jesus rescue us? Paul says that Jesus rescues us from “this present evil age”. The phrase could also be translated, “out of this present age of the wicked one”.

The Bible divides all of history into two ages: “this present age” and “the age to come”. An age is a period of time defined by foundational realities. If you think of the history of our own country over the past 100 years we can divide it into certain ages.

- The Age of the Great Depression – defined by the reality of great poverty and economic hardship.
- The Age of WWII – defined by the reality of the War. It impacted every area of life. Sugar and rubber were rationed. Husbands and sons went off to war.

This “present evil age” is an age defined by the realities of sin and demonic powers and all the resulting devastation they bring. It’s an age in which the Devil holds humanity in bondage to sin and death. This is the age of abortion, and abused kids, and sexual perversion, corruption in high places, anarchy in the streets. It is an age under the wrath of God (Romans 1).

The “age to come” is an age defined by the realities of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ and all the resulting glories that flow from it. The age to come is an age of righteousness and holiness, an age where all the effects of the fall are removed and all the powers of evil are destroyed. The age to come is defined by the victory of Jesus Christ over the Devil and the darkness. It is an age of “no more” – no more death, no more crying, no more pain, no more night.

The glory of the gospel is that the age to come has broken into this present world in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Paul writes in **2 Timothy 1:10**, Jesus has

“abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Christian conversion means being transferred out of the age of death and into the age of eternal life and light. Those who come to Christ, confessing their sin and receiving the free gift of grace and peace through Jesus are ALREADY, in that moment, delivered from this present evil age.

**John 5:24** “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me.... *has passed from death to life.*”

The Age to Come has broken into this present evil age and by faith in Jesus Christ, we cross over from the Age of Death to the Age of Eternal Life. Though we still live in this world, and though we still experience the effects of the fall and the temptations of the Devil – we no longer belong to this evil age and are no longer subject to the coming judgement that will fall on it. The realities that define our daily life are the realities of Gods’ grace to us in Jesus Christ – so that even the trials we face must serve our eternal

good. The life we live, right now, belongs to the age to come. We are already citizens of the new world awaiting to take possession of it.

**Stott:** “The purpose of Christ’s death was not only to bring us forgiveness, but that, having been forgiven, we should live a new life, the life of the age to come.

This is God’s good news for a world of sinful men and women. This is what Christ has accomplished for sinners. The only question that remains is this: have you received this gospel? I’m not asking if you have heard it before. I’m not even asking if you give intellectual assent to it. I’m asking if you have received it. Have you taken this gospel for yourself, for your own sin and for your own soul? Have you acknowledged that nothing you do can save you – only Jesus can? Do you believe that Jesus loved you and gave himself for you? Have you received Jesus as the Living Lord who gave himself for you?

If you haven’t – then today God is inviting you to come.

If you have, then God is calling you to rest and rejoice in this Jesus who loves you. Allow the realities of what God has done for you in Jesus be the defining realities of your life. Remember that no matter what each day holds in this world, you belong to the age to come and the lavish grace and boundless peace of God belongs to you.

“May the God of all hope fill you with joy and peace in believing.”

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.arizonachristian.edu/blog/2020/08/04/1-in-3-us-adults-embrace-salvation-through-jesus-more-believe-it-can-be-earned/>

<sup>2</sup> Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 18